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## Back Talk -- Censorship and Google

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A consortial-level project team (or teams) could ameliorate this. With a number of libraries in need of project work, a team of this nature could be kept busy full-time, rotating its services among members. No individual library would bear the cost of retaining such a staff full-time, but all would be able to draw upon its capacity as needed. A similar approach could be used to amortize curation, preservation, and digitization expertise and capacity across the entire shared collection.

Many libraries and consortia, of course, have already recognized and seized these opportunities:

- **The University of California's Shared Cataloging Program** and **California Digital Library** have distributed high-level skills across the entire UC system. Its **Next Generation Technical Services** initiative seeks to bring those operations to the UC network level.
- Shared offsite storage facilities like **Harvard/MIT's**, **Colorado PASCAL** and a host of others have reduced costs and collection redundancies.
- In Florida, both **FCLA** and **CCLA** provide centralized automation support for most of the academic libraries in the state.
- Programs such as **Orbis Cascade's Distributed Print Repository** have enabled libraries to extend their space while providing a secure archiving solution for valuable content.
- The **CIC's Hathi Trust** has pioneered secure digital archiving for millions of book titles.
- The **CONSORT** libraries in Ohio have drastically reduced the overlap in tangible Government Documents in their respective collections.
- The **Colorado Alliance** has implemented a large-scale digitization program for microforms.
- **Colby**, **Bates**, and **Bowdoin Colleges** have initiated a fully shared approval plan, in which weekly shipments alternate among all three campuses.
- **Columbia** and **Cornell** have begun to formally explore closer collaboration between their technical services operations, in a pilot program known as **2CUL**.

This list merely scratches the surface. There are hundreds of similar endeavors that demonstrate the actual and potential benefits of ground-based collaboration within a region. (We'll reserve the drawbacks for another, much more entertaining article.) But there is much more to be done, and well-managed consortia are the organizations best positioned to do it. No matter how fully the library in the cloud is realized, efficient exchange of material, equipment and staff will continue to require these libraries on the ground. And yea, verily, sharing shall sweep the regions...except for the region of my stuff. 🍷

*Against the Grain / February 2010*



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didn't spend more than one night in any single building for fear of assassination. We talked about the events of China during the preceding 30 plus years. I asked him if he thought China might return to the chaos of the past. He said thoughtfully, "I don't think so, I hope not."

It is this context that I think the whole episode of **Google** and its experience with China's government has to be viewed. China has experienced such sorrow and pain due to ideology, and so the current government, which lacks any ideology except a belief in the linkage between "peace" and "prosperity," refuses to allow any opposition to its own power — which situation they define as "chaos." So, in library land, as long as you don't want to buy and circulate books which challenge the Government, you are free to do what you want.

This is much better than during the Cultural Revolution when all books except those applauding **Mao** were forbidden, when all music and drama except for a relatively small selection of Communist hymns and plays

could be sung, listened to, or performed, when lady librarians couldn't wear nice clothes or use make-up, when opinions could not be expressed for fear of being exposed by your friends or family members when under pressure to give up some tidbit of counter revolutionary behavior. Yet, I hope that China will soon feel sufficiently confident of itself that the people will voluntarily choose to follow the policies of the Government and that opposing views can be tolerated without fear that they will be adopted by many other people. China is such a beautiful country, its people are so wonderfully resourceful, its culture is so remarkable, and the amount of prosperity that has been achieved in such a short period of time is so amazing that it deserves to be respected — but voluntarily. 🍷

#### Endnotes

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# Back Talk — Censorship and Google

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Someone asked me the other day about my thoughts concerning **Google's** announcement a few weeks ago that it would stop censoring news in China, even if it meant being closed down by the Government. This decision was supposedly based upon **Google's** "discovery that a China-originated attack let malicious hackers steal **Google** intellectual property and partially break into the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists."<sup>1</sup> I think it is important to note that **Google** was not protesting censorship, which **Google** itself had been practicing, and seemingly continues to practice as of this writing, in order to obtain Government support/escape the Government's ire. Rather **Google** was complaining that the Government had supported/allowed the hacking of its computers to enable it to gather information which could then be used to do really bad things to those who oppose/criticize the Party, and to take part in an act of industrial espionage.

My thoughts about all of this are fairly simple: I don't doubt that China could be guilty on both counts: wanting to get evidence to enable them to track down their opponents and wanting to collect information about the inner workings of **Google** in order to control it further and to perhaps feed this information to **Google's** Chinese competitors. The Party/Government has consistently sought to weed out the opposition with the same fervor that gardeners weekly perform their tasks to clean out all the plants they didn't sow themselves and to kill all grubs, caterpillars, grasshoppers, etc., which threaten to destroy the gardener's



vision of what their plot of land is supposed be like. China's leaders have also shown a passion for borrowing good ideas about how to do things, but their acts are only following in the footsteps of many others, including perhaps the manufacturer of the software I am now using to write this piece.

But I don't want my amplification of the above two main points to make me appear as an anti free speech China apologist. In my view, China should give up on censorship for a whole host of reasons: the need for censorship signals the weaknesses of Government policies that must be hid from the truth; in the long run, the lack of openness will repel the best and brightest from working and contributing to China's development; it encourages people to lie to the government rather than tell the truth; it simply nourishes members of the opposition who can readily point to the stupidity of these policies; it shields corrupt officials which in turn then gives the wrongful impression that everyone in Government is corrupt; and because in the current day of WEB and IT telecommunication technology, attempts to completely silence the free speech of the opposition is hopeless.

Actually my first thoughts about all of this are along the line of "if you think this is bad, compared to how things were only 35-40 years ago in China, this is nothing." In 1979 when I was a member of perhaps the first group of Asian Studies librarians to visit Chinese libraries following the Cultural Revolution and Gang of Four periods, one of my most striking memories of that trip was a visit to a public library where evidence of the censorship that had been practiced was still in place. Still sticking to book stacks were what was left after paper ribbons/strips had been pasted in a crisscross pattern to identify these materials as "poisonous weeds" and to protect them from further acts of violence.

Because the libraries and librarians themselves of that period took

on the role of the willful gardeners, they may have also been protected from personal violence to some degree since the Red Guards would know that they were doing their jobs well. But of course looking backwards at how bad things were does not justify the current, but much more sterile and bloodless acts of hacking into the **Google** computers. I do sometimes wonder about the roles now played in the hacking of the **Google** computers by the 15-year-old Red Guards of that last year of the Cultural Revolution who are now in their 50's, or the posts filled by the now 40-year-old anti-western enthusiasts of the Gang of Four period, which followed the Cultural Revolution. Are the current acts of repression directed by those former young people, or is it just the opposite, that they would run far and quickly away from such assignments?

I do think China did learn a lot from its Cultural Revolution experience when in the name of ideology confusion reigned and irrational acts of self-destruction were common. Without regard to the economic consequences of stopping the economy in its tracks, or to preventing the railroads from hauling materials from production sites to where they might be consumed or further manufactured, or to beating or killing a significant portion of a whole generation of intellectuals, or to attempting to destroy China's old culture and to rid itself of any vestige of western decadence, China's youngsters followed the dictates of their ideology and caused chaos to take control of China and to destroy the economic gains which had been accomplished through the efforts and sacrifices of their parents. This lesson, the evils of uncontrolled ideology or competing ways of life, has been learned, and the current Government will not allow it to happen again. So all competing ideologies are to be controlled or erased, e.g., religions of all persuasions including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, the Fa Lun Gong, and all competing ethnic groups including Uighurs, Tibetans, Mongols, etc., are to be systematically managed and weeded when they fail to conform.

One day in 1979, while sitting on a stone bench in the Lu Shan mountains and enjoying the scenery, I started up a conversation with an old gentleman who was walking near where I was. I asked if he could tell me anything about the lovely stone villas which dotted this mountain top resort. Since I knew that **Chairman Mao** had been to Lu Shan, indeed was deposed at a meeting held there because of the chaos and sorrow he had brought to China prior to the Cultural Revolution, I wondered where he had lived when he came there. Lu Shan had long been a mountain retreat favored by a succession of elites in China because of its cool weather even in depths of summer when the people in the valleys were slowly cooking in their own juices. The man pointed to many of the buildings and said that **Mao** normally

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